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LA WEEKLY

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L.A.'S FIRST LATINO, WOMAN MAYOR?

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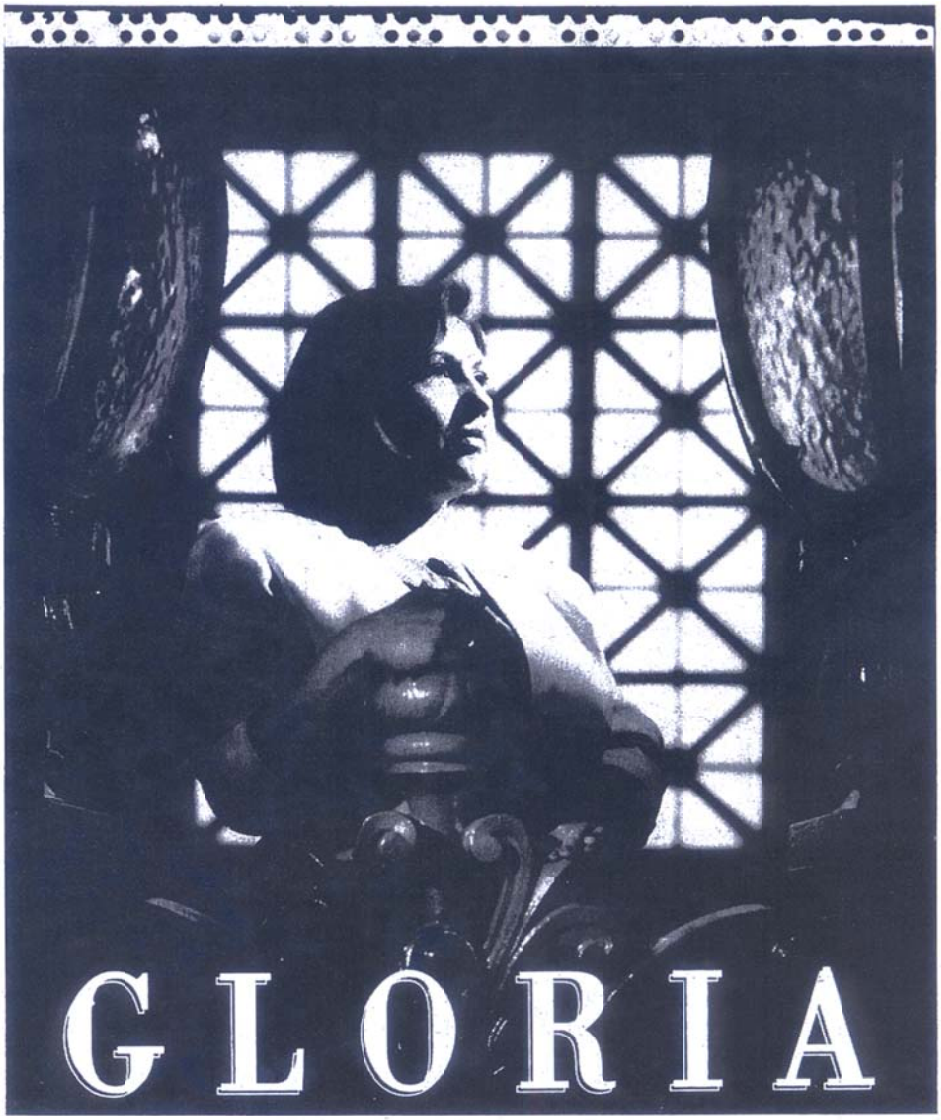

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GLORIA MOLINA

A perennial outsider comes to power — and now plans to run for mayor

BY RON CURRAN

AS DUSK SETTLES over Highland Park early on a Tuesday evening, rush-hour commuters cruise north on Figueroa Street, past the beer bars and body shops, liquor stores and laundromats. At Marmion Way, traffic suddenly grinds to a halt. Railroad gates descend and an old freight train rattles through the intersection, with three Santa Fe engines pulling dozens of aging flatbeds. None of them carries any freight, but Santa Fe must use the track at least once a month to retain its right-of-way, and the flatbeds need to be rolled to keep their wheels from rusting. The ritual offers melancholy testimony to a once-flourishing industry that falls deeper into disrepair.

The same can be said of the surrounding community. Not long ago it was a quiet suburb, nestled between downtown Los Angeles and Pasadena. Now, although the hillside neighborhoods remain relatively unchanged, much of the Highland Park flatlands is turning into badlands. For years, city leaders have ignored the needs of the community that is one of L.A.'s most heavily Latino and politically disenfranchised. Poverty is endemic and unemployment high in the overwhelmingly blue-collar neighborhoods. Single mothers head most households. Half the residents have less than eight years of education. Nearly half of the housing units are more than 40 years old. Public facilities, from schools to parks, are old and untended.

These areas have become a battleground for Latino gangs, with the "Avenue 23s" and "CP Boys" waging an escalating war on each other and the community. In recent weeks, a bystander was gunned down in a drive-by on Avenue 40 and a series of people robbed, with .45s held to their heads, as they left an Alcoholics Anonymous center. Despite increases in assaults and robberies, the LAPD allocates only six patrol cars for the entire 70,000-person Northeast Division, fewer per capita than in any other sector of the city.

As the last Santa Fe flatbed rattles through the intersection to downtown's railyards, two dozen Highland Park neighbors gather for a community meeting one-half block north of the tracks. They meet at the modest apartment of Gloria Macias, who owns and manages a weathered six-unit building on East Avenue 39. The complex, its blue paint pale and peeling, is a fortress, with bars guarding every window in an attempt to limit the frequent burglaries.

"I've lived in this neighborhood for 30 years and watched it get worse," says Macias. "Gangs and drugs have taken over, but when we've tried to get help from the city, they've ignored us. But Gloria Molina is trying to help. She's not afraid to open her mouth and get involved." First District City Council Member Gloria Molina has called tonight's meeting, part of a year-old districtwide program she calls More Advocates for Safe Homes of Los Angeles (MASH-LA). The gatherings are designed, according to program brochures, to "ensure our fair share of city services, reduce criminal activity and develop creative programs to enhance our quality of life." MASH-LA chapters have fought the issuance of new liquor licenses in Mount Washington, forced more efficient mail service in Cypress Park and held a graffiti paint-out in Echo Park.

As the neighbors, most of them middle-aged or elderly women with children and grandchildren still living under their roofs, wait for Molina to arrive, they greet one another and sit down in the small living room that's dominated by family photos. They've come to voice their fears and seek the council member's help in their struggle to maintain their community in the face of these problems.

One elderly woman spots an early-arriving Molina aide and voices the first

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complaint. "You say we should phone you if we have a problem, but I called your field office last week and no one answered," she tells David Marquez, who coordinates the MASH-LA program, which has 36 chapters in Eastside neighborhoods from Angelino Heights to Westlake. Marquez explains apologetically, "Someone broke into our office last week and stole our phones. All they left behind was '18th Street' [the name of L.A.'s largest Latino gang] etched into a trash can."

Then Gloria Molina and three staffers arrive. Blunt and confrontational, she has acknowledged the neglect of her district, conceding in March when she ran unopposed for a second term, "There were times in the last two years when I wouldn't even have voted for myself." This evening, Molina has invited David Bowman, lead officer of LAPD's Northeast Division, back to his second MASH-LA meeting. Molina, 41, enters the crowded living room carrying Valentina, her 2-year-old daughter (by her husband of three years, Northrop Corporation manager Ron Martinez).

With Molina field deputy Sylvia Novoa providing translation, the Highland Park horror stories begin in earnest. Some are the usual complaints of burnt-out street lights and inconsistent street sweeping. Others deal with harsher realities. One woman tells of men disguised as gas-meter readers stealing televisions from neighborhood homes. Another describes how, while walking her grandson home from school one afternoon, they had to step around a group of men who were shooting up on the sidewalk. ("One guy pulled a needle out of his arm and dropped it right at our feet.") Another woman tells of frequent gunshots from the playground of nearby Latona Elementary School. "We call the police," she tells Molina, "but they say they can't come out until someone is dead."

LAPD's slow response-time to calls from poor neighborhoods has long been a concern of Molina, the first-ever Latina on the City Council. Molina, who must contend with similar problems throughout most of her district, bristles as she sets Valentina down. "Call 911 when you hear gunshots," she says. "Gunshots are 911. I can't understand why you can't get a response when you report gunfire." Molina glares at Officer Bowman.

"But the reality is that the police department won't be there every time," she continues, first in English, then Spanish. "So the responsibility will have to start with ourselves, because it's our neighborhood. We need to set up our own mechanism. Keep making the calls to police, but write down every time you call. If they continue to not respond, we'll ask Officer Bowman to bring Northeast's response logs next time, so we can compare what they were doing when you called. If they can prove they had a higher priority, we'll have to accept that. But if not, we can make the department start responding to our needs, and we can do the same with other city departments."

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At 8 p.m., after 90 minutes of often heated discussion, the meeting disbands with plans to have a graffiti paint-out the following weekend and another meeting in four weeks. Then Molina corners Bowman. A local liquor store is selling to minors, she says: "I want them zapped." She asks about a recent request to crack down on a Cypress Park slumlord. "Do we have everything done on that?" "Monday," says Bowman, a strapping 6-footer who towers over Molina. "Who should I confirm that with?" she asks. "After that I talk to who? Then what's the timetable?" After Bowman explains, Molina says, "I've been hearing complaints about prostitutes at Figueroa Market." When Bowman acknowledges that hookers solicit clients at the market and bring them to a nearby apartment building, Molina says without hesitation, "We're going to have to get them cleared out. There should be plenty of documentation. Clean that place up, okay?" Bowman notes the request, looking more than a little hapless. Molina picks up Valentina and her daughter's pink plastic lunchbox, admonishes the remaining neighbors, "You *have* to make those calls," and leaves for home.

Gloria Molina's headquarters in City Hall Room 290 can best be described as functional. While colleagues such as Mike Woo have spent hundreds of thousands of tax dollars to redecorate their offices, Molina's is a monument to what might be called efficient clutter. The few flourishes of decoration are in the cramped lobby, where a couple of posters ("The Victorian Hale House," "Celebrate Cultural Diversity"), some proclamations (from the League of Latin American Citizens and the L.A. Boys and Girls Club) and a framed 1985 cover of *Ms.* magazine (in which she was named one of 12 Women of the Year) compete for space with boxes of city documents and file cabinets. Molina's lean decorating budget is one reason she has had administrative surpluses in each of her two years of more than $75,000, which she has used to hire more patrol officers for her district and to start her MASH-LA program.

Those surpluses have also allowed her to spend more money to develop a sizable staff of eager young assistants — two-thirds of them women — that is one of the most diligent and militant on the council. As Molina legislative aide Veronica Gutierrez notes, however, "It's easy for us to get results because we have the ultimate leverage — people know that if they don't follow through on our requests, they'll have to answer to Gloria. They used to think she would mellow out after a year, but she's still riding them."

Political consultant Patricia Bond, who has advised Molina since her first state Assembly race in 1982, says it was that quality that first attracted her. "I was intrigued by Gloria's fire," says Bond. "She's a very tenacious individual, real hungry, real skeptical. And she has brought that outsider approach with her to the inside."

Molina was elected in a 1987 special election to represent the newly created, court-ordered, Latino-dominated 1st District, which sprawls over L.A.'s northeast and east areas and officially is home to 200,000 residents, a figure that doesn't include undocumented immigrants. Since her election, Molina has gained a reputation for her confrontational politics in a council of accommodationists. Molina's style is curt and brusque, her voice tensing into a strident staccato whenever she is impatient. "What attracted me into the political system were all the things I disliked about it," Molina says. "I was a member of the student movement in the late '60s on various Eastside issues, and my feeling, especially as a Latina, a Chicana, was that politicians didn't respond to us as a community. I'm still driven to work against that unresponsiveness."

Molina usually is quick to express her dissatisfaction with bureaucratic protocol. Earlier this year, a motion put before the council was so loaded with legalese that Molina stood up in chambers and asked her colleagues, "I have no idea what this motion says. Do any of you?" When not a single council member could describe the motion they were about to vote on, Molina authored a resolution that future motions be written in layman's terms, which strengthened existing law. She's also among the most active members in disseminating information to residents on how to get through City Hall's red tape.

Molina's style has provoked sniping from City

Hall's old-boy insiders. But some women council staffers also express ambivalence about the effectiveness of Molina's style. "It's good that she took on an old-boy establishment and won, and her voter-registration work has been very good," says one council aide. "But she stubbornly has to know exactly where everything fits and how everything will work before deciding where she stands on an issue, and not all the i's are dotted and t's are always crossed when we're seeking support for legislation we're drafting. Her pitbull tenacity can wear down politicians who like to choose the path of least resistance. But even when you're on the same side of an issue, she's hard to work with."

Molina *has* managed to forge council coalitions in support of several issues, joining with Joel Wachs on arts and historical-preservation legislation, and with Joy Picus on toxics and the environment. (Her major environmental victories have included successfully battling a proposed oil pipeline through her district and a major incinerator in nearby Vernon.)

Now, after just 44 months in City Hall, Gloria Molina has worked her way into a position of substantial power, shaping council policy on many of the most important issues facing the city. By serving on the powerful Governmental Operations Committee, she has made recommendations on how to close rent-control loopholes, oversee redevelopment projects and strengthen ethics guidelines. Her recent appointment to chair the new Redevelopment and Housing Committee (a post for which she lobbied extensively), and her overseeing of the massive Central City West development project, assure that her influence will increase.

Sitting with legs crossed on a beige chair in her private City Hall office, her oval face framed by black pageboy-styled hair, Molina says she's definitely interested in spending more time promulgating city policy — preferably as mayor. "Well, of course, I'd love it," says Molina, who was re-elected in April to her second term (her first four-year term). "I'd love to be the person that formulates citywide policies. When I look at the mayor's office and the fact that there's a possibility that there's going to be an opening in the future, and I look at myself, I would be very, very, very interested in being the head of the whole city."

Surprisingly, a *Los Angeles Times* poll last year showed that Molina ranked third among city officials in citywide name recognition, far behind Mayor Tom Bradley but only two percentage points in back of second-place Zev Yaroslavsky, despite his decadelong quasi-campaign for mayor. To have any serious chance in a mayoral race, though, Molina must build greater support in the Valley and, most important, on the Westside, where Yaroslavsky has a great deal of support tied up pending his decision to run. The Westside political landscape is dominated by the Waxman-Berman alliance, which endorsed against Molina in her first council race. In her drive westward, Molina has enlisted the help of mainstream Westside political insiders like businessman Stan Hirsch and attorney Bob Hertzberg to provide introductions to the right people, a process that began in the final week of September.

"The Westside is a natural base for Gloria," says a longtime Molina adviser. "Her record appeals to the environmental concerns, controlled-growth concerns, and she'll continue to have support of women's groups. But support is one thing, raising money is another. She hates fundraising. Will she be able to do it? We don't know. That's what we're exploring."

Most of Molina's policies *would* seem to appeal to the largely liberal Westside, and many advocates of social programs generally consider her an ally. "If you asked me to pick two or three council members who are most receptive, one would be Molina," says Gary Blasi of the Legal Aid Foundation of Los Angeles. "She is still relatively new to the city mechanism and sometimes doesn't seem to really have a grasp of what should be done and how to get them done. But she's given off good signals so far and she's just about the best we've got."

The 1st District's problems of crime and gangs, joblessness and lack of affordable housing are nothing new to Molina. Unlike many of her council colleagues, she was raised without benefit of wealth or expensive education, grappling with those problems every day. Born in Pico Rivera in 1948, the oldest of 10 children of first-generation Mexican-American farm workers, Molina grew up in an impoverished neighborhood in Montebello. She wanted to become a fashion designer, but she decided to help support her family at age 18 by going to work as a legal secretary after her father was seriously injured in a car crash. At night, she took classes at Rio Hondo Community College.

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"I was intrigued by Gloria's fire," says one supporter. "She's a very tenacious individual, real hungry, real skeptical. And she has brought that outsider approach with her to the inside."

As a freshman, Molina volunteered to counsel young girls who were gang members. "I began to realize that the part of the reason people got involved with gangs was that they felt powerless to do anything else," she says. "And the political system, by ignoring our community, was largely responsible for that."

Soon after, Molina helped found the L.A. chapter of Comision Femenil Mexicana Nacional, a Latina support group. She also became involved with numerous Eastside activist groups on issues ranging from opposing English-only initiatives to supporting voter registration.

But Molina says she soon began to question if, working outside of the system, she'd be able to effect changes as she'd hoped. "What was happening in our community was more directly influenced by politicians' decisions than community organizing," she says. "I started helping out in some campaigns."

At 20, Molina volunteered in Robert Kennedy's local presidential campaign headquarters. The following year she helped on Ralph Ochoa's state Assembly campaign, and then, in what would become an ironic pairing, on Richard Alatorre's Assembly race. After he won, Alatorre referred her to Art Torres, who was preparing his own Assembly campaign in 1974. After his election, Torres hired her as an administrative assistant. She took a leave of absence two years later to organize Latino voters statewide for the Carter-Mondale campaign, then, after returning to Torres' office for a year, was appointed in 1977 as deputy director of the Department of Presidential Personnel.

Molina was based in the White House, providing the president with recommendations for appointments to the various federal boards and commissions. But within two years Molina grew disenchanted when she realized the extent of anti-Latino sentiments among administration officials. "I was recommending appointments," says Molina, "but I discovered that our community was not looked upon as significant enough to ultimately be given appointments to major commissions. I needed to get out of D.C."

Molina recommended one last appointment — her own, to the vacant post of deputy director of the Department of Health and Human Services' regional office in San Francisco. She resigned the following year when Carter was defeated by Ronald Reagan and, thanks to recommendations from Art Torres and Richard Alatorre, was appointed by Willie Brown as his Southern California chief of staff.

In 1982, Art Torres announced that he was going to run for Alex Garcia's state Senate seat, which meant he had to vacate his 56th District Assembly seat. Then-Assemblyman Richard Alatorre quickly drafted aide Richard Polanco, and persuaded the United Farm Workers and the Waxman-Berman organization to support him. Pat Bond recalls that, soon after, she received a phone call from Molina. "She wanted to know what her chances would be of winning if she joined the race," says Bond. "We told her there was probably a strong disincentive for a woman running in that district, and that Polanco had a head start. But she still seemed willing."

Molina, who says she still considered herself "primarily a behind-the-scenes person," decided to step up to center stage. "As soon as Art announced, the Eastside powers-that-be instantly moved in and decided who would be their candidate," recalls Molina. "I felt I needed to challenge that — for myself and for a lot of us. But I knew it wasn't going to be easy."

It wasn't. Polanco had been given a well-tooled campaign machine and the money to fuel it. But Molina picked up support from former boss Torres and the godfather of East L.A. politics, Congressman Ed Roybal. She also rallied a volunteer staff of more than 1,000 canvassers. According to Pat Bond,

though, "The deciding factor was that Gloria completely out-hustled Polanco, putting in hours going door-to-door and refusing to give up." On June 8, 1982, Molina won with 52 percent to Polanco's 46 percent.

But Molina's strenuous campaign would prove easy compared to the problems she would have adjusting to life in the Sacramento State House. Her "pitbull tenacity" and refusal to cooperate with party leaders led to her being almost immediately ostracized. "Molina tried to sponsor some very brave legislation," says a council staffer who worked in the Assembly during Molina's tenure. "She challenged people like mortgage brokers, whom no one else up there would dare take on. But Molina seemed to go out of her way to make a point of her 'independence,' so she actually accomplished very few of her ideas."

Molina had some minor successes, primarily with legislation designed to encourage children not to drop out of school. But her unwavering opposition to construction of a new state prison on the Eastside angered both Democratic Assembly Speaker (and former boss) Willie Brown and Republican Governor George Deukmejian. Thereafter, her more ambitious bills were routinely rejected on both sides of the aisle.

Despite those battles, Molina was re-elected in 1984 and 1986. Weeks later, however, the increasing frustration led her to start eyeing a new City Council seat that a court had ordered established to allow better representation of Latinos. When the new 1st District was officially proclaimed, Molina declared her candidacy.

The Eastside establishment, led by Alatorre (who had left the Assembly in 1986 to become the first Latino council member in more than 20 years), also wanted control of the new seat, and quickly got behind a candidate. It wasn't Molina. Instead, Alatorre drafted school board member Larry Gonzalez. Joining Alatorre in support of Gonzalez were Assembly members Richard Polanco, Mike Roos and Richard Floyd, former Council Member Art Snyder, unions representing firefighters and police, and major developers such as Alexander Haagen and Goldrich & Kest. Former Molina boss Art Torres also joined the Gonzalez team. Ed Roybal was the only Eastside establishment leader to back Molina, who also got support from council members Mike Woo and Joel Wachs, the League of Conservation Voters and citywide feminist organizations.

In short order, the race evolved into a battle between Molina and Alatorre, with discussion of issues superseded by Molina's harsh criticism of machine politics and Gonzalez's attacks on her Assembly attendance record and support of state Supreme Court Chief Justice Rose Bird. Molina benefited from greater name-recognition thanks to her anti-prison crusade and, again, from the help of many of the same volunteers who'd been supporting Molina since her Polanco campaign.

Aware that the special-election timetable left them just 12 weeks to campaign, Molina's staff hit the ground running. Molina's aggressive canvassing and Gonzalez's slow start combined to help Molina win the Feb. 3, 1987 election, receiving 57 percent of the 12,000 ballots cast, while Gonzalez attracted only 26 percent. Molina won almost every precinct, including high-turnout areas ranging from Mount Washington (affluent Anglo) to Montecito Heights (middle-class mixed) to Lincoln Heights (working-class Latino and Asian), and took practically every other community from Chinatown to Highland Park. At 38, Molina became the council's first-ever Latina member.

The Molina-Alatorre schism that began during her first Assembly race and intensified in her council race widened in her first term on the council. The council's two Eastside reps shared concern for many causes important to the Latino community. But on city issues most important to Molina's district they have often differed completely. Their feud has further splintered an already weak Eastside electorate. The Alatorre-Torres alliance gained power essentially by default, exploiting the lack of participation in the city's most disenfranchised area. Molina's repeated victories over the Eastside establishment showed how the community's few active voters had tired of lock-step politics.

Since her election to the council, Molina has entrenched herself even more strongly in the community. She has sponsored voter-registration drives and gained a reputation among many on the Eastside as a politician with populist instincts. "Gloria has made a lot of friends because her first priority is the interests of people with minimal political clout," says Patsy Carter of the 23rd Street Neighbors community group. "Her desire is to assist the everyday resident, not the people who swoop into the district to make a buck."

By some measures, Molina has eclipsed Alatorre in Eastside power and popularity. Alatorre didn't even bother to back an opponent last spring when Molina ran for a second term ("He didn't want anything to do with us after what Gloria did to him the first time," says Pat Bond), and the City Hall consensus now is that he will probably abandon the council and his mayoral goal to run for county supervisor if a Latino district is created.

On citywide policy, Molina has also differed with Alatorre in their positions on development and planning. Molina entered office with slow-growth tendencies, prompting Prop. U co-author Marvin Braude to praise her as "independent of persons voting the developer line and someone who will strengthen the controlled-growth coalition." But the nature of Molina's district has made her development stance more complicated than most. While she has usually supported broader controlled-growth issues, Molina has been under pressure to attract development to her district's poorer neighborhoods. Thus, she has formed alliances with the Community Redevelopment Agency and developers, sometimes granting them concessions in an effort to generate new jobs and housing.

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Those alliances, however, have raised questions about a possible change in Molina's priorities. Where in her first council race she relied largely on financial support from individuals and organizations sympathetic to her environmental and feminist positions, more now comes from development and business interests. While this kind of shift is not uncommon among newly elected council members, critics say those big-money teamings have also led to decisions that conflict with her "on the side of the little guy" image and with key aspects of her professed agenda.

On the hot and smoggy morning of Sept. 29, Gloria Molina arrived at the dedication of the Villa Nueva housing project, 20 units of low-income apartments built in Pico-Union near the interchange of the Harbor and Santa Monica freeways. A large crowd of housing advocates and neighbors had gathered to celebrate the project, which was developed by the non-profit L.A. Family Housing Corporation, supported by Molina and subsidized by the Community Redevelopment Agency. But, as attractive as Villa Nueva may be, its few units are nothing compared to the number of affordable apartments the CRA has destroyed — but not replaced — in the neighborhood, where it demolished hundreds of units one block west to make room for commercial projects like a Pep Boys store and, one block east, to expand the city's convention center.

Battling the flu, Molina hosted CRA chairman Jim Wood and assorted dignitaries on a small stage. When it was a shirt-sleeved Wood's turn to address the crowd, he offered to define his agency. "The CRA takes local taxes, and we're proud of where they go," he said, raising his arms toward the Villa Nueva. "They go right here!" The crowd cheered wildly as Wood returned triumphantly to his seat next to Molina.

Later, Molina laughed when asked to comment on Wood's performance, before offering a more serious assessment. "In a sense he's correct," says Molina, who has worked with the agency in Pico-Union, Chinatown and Lincoln Heights. "But their investment in projects like that, compared to everything they do with projects to build things like the skyline, is obviously minuscule."

'Even if Molina can double the current total of Eastside registered voters, they would still be far outnumbered by their Westside and South-Central counterparts.

But some advocates of affordable housing and other social programs question the motives of Molina, who used to shy from cultivating her allies, as she now teams with factions of the city's power elite whose agenda is clearly in conflict with her expressed goals.

"It's definitely true that Molina has changed as she has set her sights on becoming mayor," says Karen Jaeger of the Inner City Alliance, a coalition of progressive neighborhood organizations. "After she was first elected, I was impressed by her apparent openness to new ideas and commitment to housing. But these days she works primarily with mainstream allies like UNO [United Neighborhoods Organization] who agree with her gospel, and she spends more time listening to developers than the neighbors who are affected by their projects. Molina wants me to join her MASH program and clean up the streets, while she's sitting with developers determining how rich a person will have to be to drive on them. So the MASH group gives me no power, just a broom in my hands."

Some of Molina's decisions lend credence to critics' questions. Under pressure from politically connected local businesses, she has sponsored police sweeps of MacArthur Park that have been decried as discriminatory harassment by leaders of some civil-liberties groups. They say Salvadoran immigrants have been singled out particularly in the sweeps, which have seen hundreds of "suspected gang members" detained, but few charged.

Some of Molina's housing decisions have also seemed inconsistent. She has opposed development in the more affluent (and politically connected) sectors of her district, on one occasion fighting construction of new condos in Mount Washington. But in poorer and less politically organized areas, developers have been encouraged.

With the proposed Central City West project in the Temple-Beaudry neighborhood just west of the Harbor Freeway, a specific plan Molina supports will allow developers — including some campaign contributors — to demolish 4,300 low-income units in favor of 25 million square feet of commercial high-rise development. Molina is asking developers to build 3,000 replacement units on the site, but will allow them to move the remaining 1,300 displaced families outside of the project area.

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Molina says the development — which will be nearly three times the office space of Century City — and some displacement are unavoidable. "In a so-called 'boom town' like Los Angeles, this kind of progress and expansion is inevitable," she says.

Molina's relationship with developers was complicated even further when, as a member of the council's Governmental Operations Committee, she helped to draft recommendations on a proposal that the council assume complete control over CRA activities. Despite her own experience with the agency and testimony proving, among other things, that the agency categorized cots in homeless shelters as single-family apartments to cover up its poor affordable-housing record, Molina emerged as an adamant opponent to council oversight. Instead, she supported a compromise that critics contend allows the CRA basically to continue with business as usual. And when the issue went before the full council, her strident criticism of the full-control proposal culminated in a shouting match with proposal sponsor Zev Yaroslavsky.

Molina dismisses accusations that she is selling out to win support for her mayoral aspirations. "Well, gee, I've never heard that, but that's interesting," offers Molina. "My feeling about redevelopment law is that it's very good, but I have not been one of those people that feel that the CRA has dealt with priorities of the city in the sense that I'd like to see them. They don't have a housing policy. They can wipe out blocks in a minute. If they want to take someone's house they can say, 'Here is market value, goodbye.' The council needs to help create affordable-housing policies for the CRA."

But Molina adds that complete council control would only have perpetuated the council's parochial redevelopment process. "Let's say there is a controversial project, like in Hollywood with Mike Woo," she says. "Believe me, it may be controversial, but [council oversight] wouldn't change anything. What are [council members] going to do, veto it? Do you think this council is going to veto one of Mike Woo's redevelopment projects? I've been on this council now long enough to know that isn't the way it operates. I don't see the difference [between complete council control and her oversight compromise]. Like Joy Picus is going to stand up and say, 'I oppose Michael's project'?"

A desire to get out of the territorial politics of the council and deal more with citywide housing and planning policies, Molina says, is one reason she would like to be mayor. "I'm not interested in dealing with this individual developer and that developer," she says. "I would rather be involved in developing a set of policies, right up front, that must be implemented all the way through the development process."

Molina says that policies she will push for include very strong linkage fees and inclusionary zoning, in which commercial developers must include low-income housing for childcare facilities in any development. "These are controversial policies and developers consider them very radical, but if they want to put up a commercial building, they're going to have to respond to the social needs of the city," she says. "We want to stop the cityfrom becoming a Manhattan or a San Francisco, where there is an elitism that allows only a certain group of people to live here. It's very important to me that Los Angeles is truly a city of ethnic and economic diversity."

Where Molina used to say that she would use the council as a steppingstone to succeed 73-year-old Eastside Congressman Ed Roybal when he retires, her immediate goal has clearly become succeeding Tom Bradley as mayor. She will have a number of rivals in that contest, likely beginning with fellow council members Zev Yaroslavsky and Mike Woo. If Yaroslavsky decides to run, for example, he would be favored to carry the Westside and at least some of the Valley, forcing Molina to draw from South-Central and the Eastside. If City Attorney James Hahn were her leading opponent, he would inherit considerable support from South-Central. A strong Mike Woo candidacy would force Molina to scramble even more for Westside votes.

There is also the question of whether the Eastside, with such low voter participation, can be a power base of major significance to any mayoral candidate. Even if Molina can double the current total of 100,000 registered Eastside voters and get them all to turn out for her, they would still be far outnumbered by voters on the high-turnout Westside and even by their South-Central counterparts. Eastside turnout could be closer to 10 percent than 100 percent, with most of those voters coming from affluent non-Latino communities such as Mount Washington.

Molina's chances will also depend on her ability to raise funds. Just by virtue of her overseeing Central City West, she should be able to count on considerable funding from the developers trying to woo her favor — or at least hedge their bets — on behalf of that massive project. She would also have the firm support of women's groups citywide (though historically these have yet to become a major source of funding in citywide elections), and possibly of housing and environmental groups.

Maury Weiner helped devise the successful 1973 mayoral campaign that gained citywide support for Tom Bradley, who then, like Molina, represented a minority district. "The next leader will emerge from the same kind of coalition that Bradley emerged from," says Weiner, "a grouping of organizations that will find their natural cause and voice over the next four or eight years.The person who is most responsible for bringing these groups together is the leader who will benefit from their support. Anyone looking down the line will have to build on the coalition that exists. You can't just attack other elements of the coalition. You will have to work with 'not so friendly' elements."

In the Assembly, her opposition to a new state prison on the Eastside angered both Willie Brown and George Deukmejian. Thereafter, her more ambitious bills were routinely rejected by both parties.

Bradley, Weiner readily admits, was the beneficiary of a convergence of forces mobilized during the '60s. "It wasn't Tom Bradley going out and building a coalition, but rather a process by which a coalition came together informally and not always consciously. And then Tom Bradley's candidacy provided a vehicle for them to come together." But L.A. communities are more insular today, their concerns more parochial, than they were in the '60s. The challenge before Gloria Molina— or anyone who aspires to govern Los Angeles in the post-Bradley era — may be little less than the re-invention of the city. LA